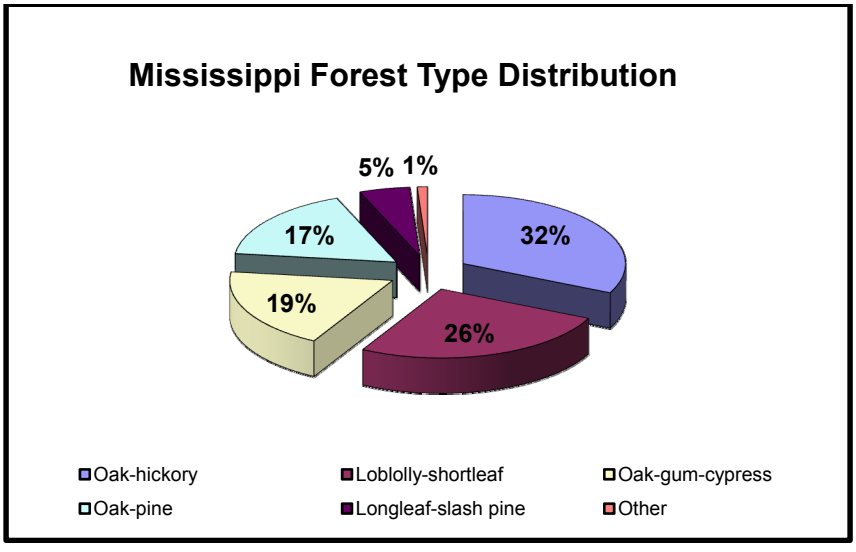
Mississippi

Forest Health Highlights 2009

The Resource

Mississippi's forests cover 19.9 million acres, more than 65% of the state's land area. Some 13.1 million acres of the states forested land is in non-industrial private ownership, while approximately 1.1 million acres are in national forests. Mississippi's forests are prized for their scenic beauty, supporting tourism and outdoor recreation and providing wildlife habitat throughout the state. Major forest types in the state include oak-hickory, loblolly and shortleaf pine, longleaf and slash pine, mixed oak-pine, and oak-gum-cypress.



Forest Influences and Programs

Redbay Ambrosia Beetle was detected for the **first** time in Jackson County, MS in July 2009. This insect carries with it a fungus that causes Laurel Wilt. Since its introduction on the east coast, it has caused considerable mortality to redbay and swamp bay and to a lesser degree other species of Lauraceae. Records of distribution have it occurring only along the east coast from South Carolina to Florida. The detection of this insect in Mississippi represents a considerable jump in distribution or another introduction. Efforts are underway to determine the extent of the problem and possible solutions.

Joe MacGown and John Riggins – Mississippi State University

Don't Bring Firewood With You magnet as used by the Mississippi Forestry Commission

Southern pine beetle (SPB) has been Mississippi's most significant forest insect pest. Populations statewide have been very low for a number of years. In 2009, activity was again low, as was predicted from surveys of 14 counties during the spring by the Mississippi Forestry Commission. No spots have been detected on state and private lands, nor on national forest or other federal lands. Even though no SPB spots have been detected 95 adult SPB males were captured in the spring survey. The SPB is still present but at extremely low levels. Activity on federal lands was at extremely low levels as well. The state has developed a comprehensive *SPB Prevention/Education Program* to teach landowners about the benefits of thinning in reducing SPB hazard and improving forest health overall. In addition to the educational aspects of this program there is an associated cost-share component to assist landowners in getting the thinning accomplished on a statewide basis beginning in 2009. Recently awarded stimulus funds toward this effort will also target assisting private forestry consultants and the logging operators required in addition to the private non-industrial landowners involved.

Pine engraver beetles (*Ips* spp.) activity continues to decline, especially in areas affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita during 2005. Concern does exist that activity may again increase due to the excess rainfall during 2009. In many parts of the state rainfall is 20 plus inches above normal.

Sudden Oak Death surveys were conducted again in 2009 by pathologists from Mississippi State University and other federal agencies. The surveys focused on baiting water courses with susceptible leaves to detect the presence of the pathogen *(Phytophthora ramorum)* downstream from potential sources. If established in or outside of horticultural nurseries that have received potentially infected stock from shippers in California, the pathogen can show up in drainage water. A positive stream baiting obtained in late 2007 outside a nursery in the Jackson area caused concern initially. Sampling continued during 2009. At present, the pathogen is not considered to be established in the natural environment.

Cogongrass is a non-native, invasive plant that has been spreading aggressively in Mississippi in recent years. It takes over native grasses and vegetation and is a fire hazard under pine plantations. The severity and extent of infestations are increasing considerably in the disturbed forests following hurricane Katrina in 2005. The state has a Cogon Grass Task Force that is coordinating efforts to assist landowners and agencies with control/management of this species. On October 14, 2008 multiple agencies and groups signed an MOU

J.R. Meeker, Florida Division of Forestry, Bugwood.org

concerning a newly enacted statewide Cooperative Weed Management Area. During 2009 the Mississippi Forestry Commission has developed a Statewide Campaign on Cogongrass Awareness, Identification and Suppression. Also, in 2009, a invasive species spraying program has been funded with stimulus funds. Total funding for this project is $1,167,000.

Forest Health Assistance in Mississippi

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